



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 106th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 146

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, MARCH 21, 2000

No. 32

House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mrs. MORELLA).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
March 21, 2000.

I hereby appoint the Honorable CONSTANCE A. MORELLA to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Mr. Lundregan, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed a concurrent resolution of the following title in which concurrence of the House is requested:

S. Con. Res. 96. Concurrent Resolution recognizing and honoring the members of the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA) who are being awarded the AHEPA Medal for Military Service for service in the Armed Forces of the United States.

The message also announced that pursuant to Public Law 106-31, as amended by Public Law 106-113, the Chair, on behalf of the President pro tempore, appoints the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. FRIST) to the Russian Leadership Program Advisory Board.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 19, 1999, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to

exceed 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) for 5 minutes.

BEFORE NEW GUN LAW, ENFORCE ONES ON BOOKS

Mr. STEARNS. Madam Speaker, it reflects well on the human condition that tragedy often brings out the best in people: compassion, resolve, understanding. Sometimes, unfortunately, a tragedy can also release the darker human impulses: cynicism, dishonesty, and opportunism. It is a regret that many times individuals will take advantage of a tragedy to promote an ill-conceived agenda.

Last month, the Nation was stunned by the shocking death of 6-year-old Kayla Rolland in Mount Morris Township, Michigan. This young girl was killed in a classroom by a fellow student, a 6-year-old boy. This loss echoed beyond the family involved, her school, and their community. It touched all of us, evoking a sense of nationwide grief and dread.

Madam Speaker, sadly, it was not long before the heartbreaking death of this girl was transformed into a means of a lot of political points. That very day, the President announced that this tragedy should be an election issue. He went on to demand passage of various gun-control measures.

First, we should look at the facts of this matter and consider what difference this administration's proposals would have made. Chuck Green of the Denver Post did this for us when he asked these questions in a recent column:

Did the little boy have a concealed-carry permit?

Did the little boy purchase the weapon from an independent dealer after

failing a background check by a licensed dealer at a gun show?

Did the little boy use false identification when purchasing the weapon?

Did the little boy use an illegal automatic weapon in the assault?

Did the little boy have an older person, possibly a 9-year-old child, purchase this gun on his behalf?

The answer to this killing is not to be found in too few gun laws, but rather in how this boy was raised. He was living with his uncle and another man, sleeping on the couch in the living room.

It was a home reportedly with a constant flow of strangers seeking crack and trading guns. The .32 caliber pistol used to kill the girl was stolen.

Now, I expect that some of my colleagues would claim that child safety locks would have prevented the shooting in the classroom. Now, selling crack is illegal, as is trading for guns. Do they really think that these individuals would have obeyed a law requiring safety locks?

I would also remind my colleagues that Michigan already has a number of State laws targeting gun violence on the books. These are some of the laws: prohibit selling any firearm to a minor under 18; prohibit possession of a handgun by person under age 18; prohibit possession of any firearms, including BB guns on school property; prohibit possession of even a BB gun beyond the yard of a minor's home unless accompanied by a person over 18; prohibit intentionally pointing, even without malice, any firearm at another person; require that all handguns must be registered; require a license to purchase a handgun from a dealer or a private individual; void the handgun license if not used within 10 days of issuance; require theft of a gun to be reported to police within 5 days of discovery.

Gun violence is a scourge on our Nation, and we have a responsibility to tackle this plague, not with empty gestures, but with solid action. Instead of

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



Printed on recycled paper.

H1125

passing new gun laws, we should enforce those already on the books.

Here in Washington, for example, there are 2,400 violent crimes committed with firearms in 1998. Only two criminals were prosecuted in Federal court for these gun crimes. This is not uncommon. A study by Syracuse University found that Federal prosecution of gun crimes has dropped, has dropped by 44 percent since 1993.

However, only a 2-hour drive from here, where I am speaking, vigorous Federal action has helped to reduce gun homicides in Richmond, Virginia, by one half. Project Exile is an effective, anti-violence program promising Federal prosecution and an additional 5 years in jail for felons caught with a gun. In Richmond, more prosecutions under Federal gun laws took place than in California, New Jersey, New York, and Washington, D.C. combined.

The President and his supporters want to create a false sense of security by enacting more laws with little or no real impact on the problem. A stronger commitment to enforcing the laws already on the books will do far more to protect our communities and our school rooms from gun violence.

GUN VIOLENCE UNDERCUTTING AMERICAN VALUES

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. MORELLA). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague discussing the issue of gun violence, but I could not disagree with his assessment more.

A livable community is one where people are safe, healthy, and economically secure. Gun violence undercuts each of those elements. We are not safe today in the epidemic of gun violence, whether it is in Mount Morris Township, Michigan; Littleton, Colorado; or Springfield, Oregon. Gun violence is a leading cause of death and injury, 12 per day for children alone. And our families are not economically secure. Gun injuries, injuries, cost almost \$20,000 per incident to treat, and the cost of a gun-related death is approximately one-third of a million dollars.

In the face of overwhelming evidence about gun violence, the gun apologists continue to argue that guns somehow make us safer, and simple common sense gun legislation is unnecessary. By their logic, we could get rid of metal detectors in airports. Yes, a few guns might get through, but almost certainly well-armed passengers would gun down the terrorists.

A little article in today's Post notes that for the second time in a week, a passenger was arrested on a plane for assaulting a pilot. Would we be better off if that passenger had been armed so that there would have been a gun battle instead of a fist fight?

The NRA argues that the people who want to reduce gun violence have blood

on their hands, that they want a certain level of violence. I was with the President of the United States as he visited the victims and the families in my State in Springfield, Oregon; and I know that such an assertion is as untrue as it is sick and twisted.

Tragically, it is consistent with the NRA's approach and that of their apologists. They oppose even the most simple common sense approaches. If they had their way, the Brady Bill would not have passed and 400,000 felons and mentally ill people would have had guns outright, instead of eliminating that opportunity for them. Does anyone think that that would have made us safer?

We do not have to be stalemated by this argument. There are simple common sense approaches. We can require safe storage of guns. Maybe it would not have made a difference for that little 6-year-old boy and the girl he shot in terms of that home, but maybe the gun would not have been stolen in the first place if it had been in a lockbox.

We can lead by example by making sure that smart gun technology is available for law enforcement officials. One in six law enforcement officials who are killed with a gun are killed with their own service revolver or that of one of their partners. If the Federal Government and State governments would announce that next year we will not purchase guns that are not personalized, that cannot be wrestled away, we could move that technology forward by leaps and bounds.

We can make guns safer to reduce accidental death and injury. Why in the name of all that is holy do we sell guns in this country that do not tell you whether or not there is a bullet in the chamber, when we have mandated child-proof bottles for aspirin and cigarette lighters? Why do we have more consumer protections for toy guns than real guns? Sadly, it is the apologists for the gun lobby who have had their way.

We can also keep guns out of the hands of violent felons; not just violent felons, but violent misdemeanants as well. A study at the University of California-Davis has demonstrated that those who are convicted of misdemeanor crimes are 7.5 times more likely to be charged with new crimes than those with no criminal records. The vast majority of people who own guns, as well as normal citizens who do not, support prohibitions like this.

Finally, we can take a step here in Congress today. We can end the gridlock. The Republican leadership should, must, let us move forward. The conferees on the juvenile violence bill have not met since August, hung up over these gun violence provisions. They ought to meet. They ought to meet today and allow us to vote on these simple, common sense provisions.

Finally, people at home today have an opportunity and responsibility themselves to reduce gun violence. Parents should not only demand that

Congress act, but they should make sure that if they have a gun in a home, that it is stored safely, and if a child of theirs is going to go next door to play at a neighbor's house, they ought to find out if there is a gun in that house and demand that it be stored safely before their child plays there.

There is no excuse for continuing to tolerate the highest rate of gun violence in the developed world in our country.

INS MANAGEMENT NEEDS TO DO ITS JOB

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. METCALF) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. METCALF. Madam Speaker, I do not have to remind this House about the fine work of our Border Patrol agents. They put their lives at risk every day to slow the flow of illegal drugs into this country and to keep our borders safe from dangerous aliens. Their work in helping to arrest a suspected terrorist near Port Angeles, Washington, in December was exemplary. We all appreciate their efforts. Due to the current inept management of the INS, however, the job of these officers is made much, much more difficult.

□ 1245

Over the past two fiscal years, Congress has appropriated funds for the INS to hire 2,000 new Border Patrol agents. The agency has failed to hire anywhere near that number, and every new agent they have hired has been assigned to the southern border, even though our northern border also has problems.

In fact, until recently, the INS had been detailing agents from our already shorthanded northwestern border to shore up its Border Patrol officers in Arizona. At one point, nearly 10 percent of the field agents in Washington State were assigned to the southern border. The INS has indefinitely postponed the details, but refuses to call a permanent halt to transfers to the southern border.

This is not what Congress wanted. There were supposed to be more agents in Washington State, not less. I agree that there are serious problems on the southern border. That is why the INS was given so much money for the Border Patrol last year. The INS management needs to do its job and hire more agents instead of robbing from one shorthanded border to fill out another. There is no reason why northern border staffing should not be increased.

Last week, with my colleagues, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. NETHERCUTT) and the gentleman from Washington (Mr. HASTINGS), I sent a letter to the INS Commissioner, Doris Meissner, demanding a permanent end to transfers of the northwestern Border